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Public Hearing Date: January 10, 2006
Land Use Action Date: March 7, 2006
Board of Aldermen Action Date: March 20, 2006
90-Day Expiration Date: April 10, 2006

TO: Board of Aldermen

FROM: Michael Kruse, Director of Planning and Development
Nancy Radzevich, Chief Planner
Jean Fulkerson, Principal Planner

DATE: January 6, 2006

SUBJECT: **Petition #461-05, CHAPEL BRIDGE PARK INC.,** petition for a SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to install two free-standing signs at the 5 CHAPEL STREET/ 70 BRIDGE STREET building entrances. The property, also known as Sec 14, Blk 1, Lot 14, contains 170,913 sf of land and is located in a district zoned MANUFACTURING.

CC: Mayor David B. Cohen

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Board of Aldermen and the public with technical information and planning analysis which may be useful in the special permit decision making process of the Board of Aldermen. The Planning Department's intention is to provide a balanced view of the issues with the information it has at the time of the public hearing. There may be other information that will be presented at or after the public hearing that the Land Use Committee will consider in its discussion at a subsequent Working Session.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The petitioner is seeking approval of two (2) free-standing signs for Chapel Bridge Park to be located on separate street frontage, at the entrances to 55 Chapel Street and 70 Bridge Street in Nonantum. The petitioner is requesting to legalize an existing free-standing sign at 55 Chapel Street, and to replace and legalize a second free-standing sign at 70 Bridge Street, with one that will match the sign at 55 Chapel Street. The subject property is located in Nonantum, in a Manufacturing District and contains several buildings that were converted from manufacturing uses to current office and research and development space. Research of City records revealed no prior special permit approval of either existing sign.

70 Bridge Street
and
55 Chapel Street

Zoning

Zoning Districts

- Single Res. 1
- Single Res. 2
- Single Res. 3
- Business 1
- Business 2
- Business 4
- Business 5
- Lim. Manuf.
- Manuf.
- Multi-Res. 1
- Multi-Res. 2
- Multi-Res. 3
- Multi-Res. 4
- Mixed Use 1
- Mixed Use 2
- OS/Rec.
- Public Use

- Newton Boundary
- Property Boundaries
- Ponds/Rivers

Streams

- Intermittent
- Perennial
- Pond Names
- Buildings
- Street Names
- Stream Names

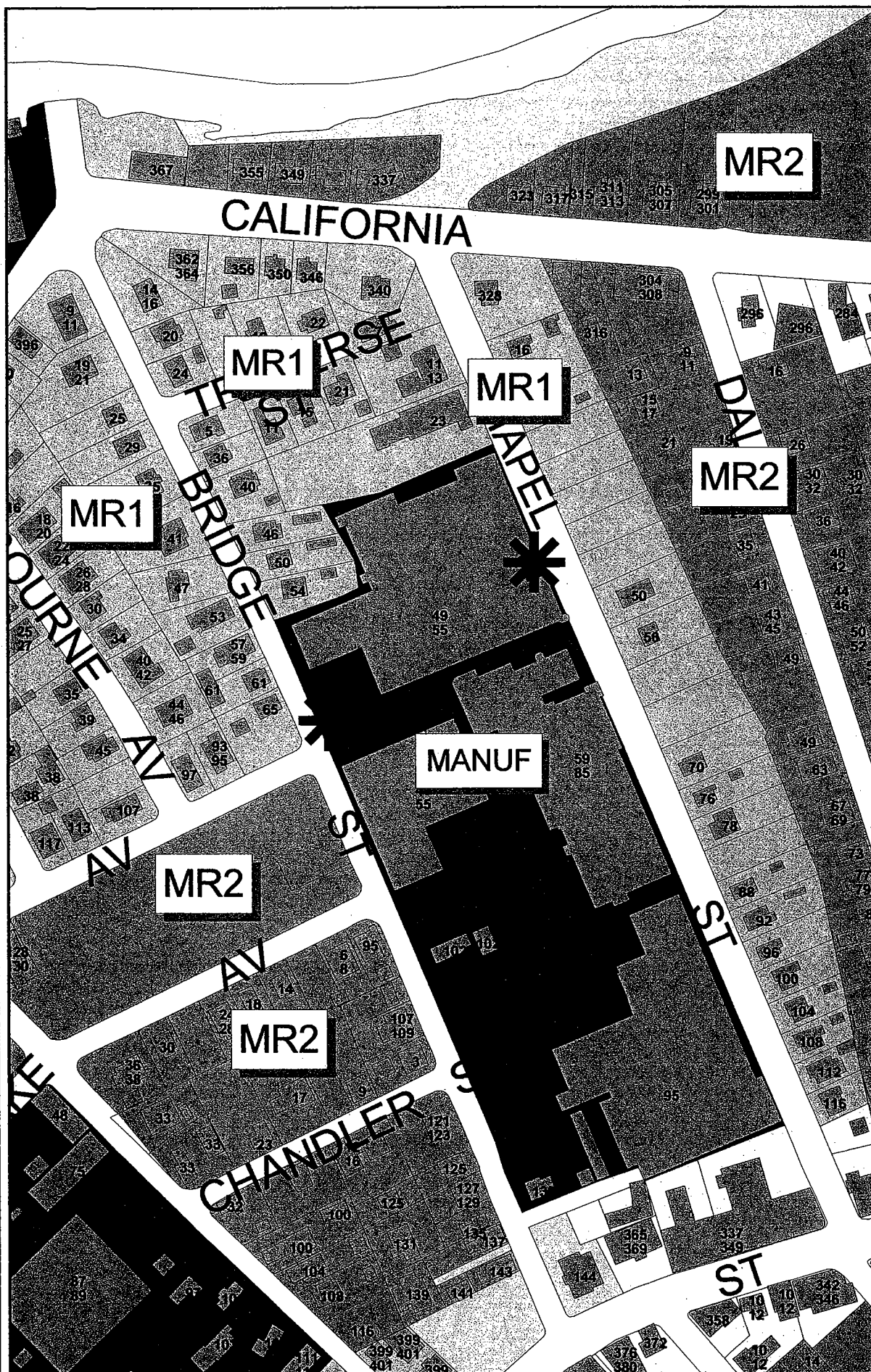
Address Numbers

1" : 210.9'



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70 Bridge Street and 55 Chapel Street Land Use

Land Use

- Single Family Residential
- Multifamily Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use
- Vacant Land
- Golf Course
- Open Space
- Private Educational
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Public Housing
- Tax Exempt

- Newton Boundary
- Property Boundaries
- Ponds/Rivers

Streams

- Intermittent
- Perennial

- Pond Names

- Buildings

- Street Names

- Stream Names

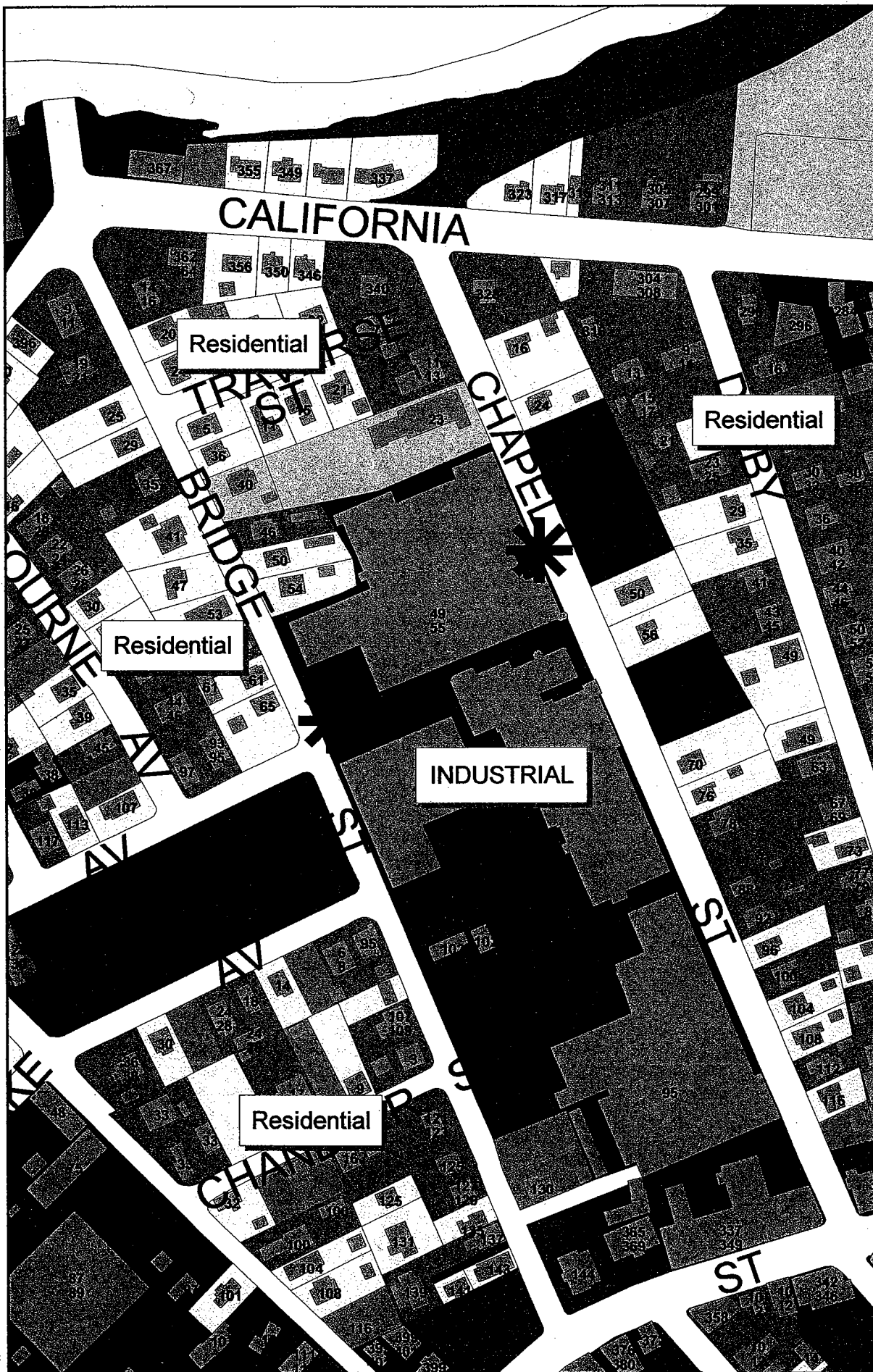
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I. ZONING RELIEF BEING SOUGHT

Based on the Chief Zoning Code Official's written determination (SEE ATTACHMENT "A"), the petitioner is seeking relief from or approvals through the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance:

- *Section 30-20(l) for approval of a free-standing sign;*
- *Section 30-23 for Site Plan Approval; and*
- *Section 30-24(d) for Special Permit Approval.*

II. ELEMENTS OF THE PETITION

The petitioner is seeking approval of two (2) free-standing signs for Chapel Bridge Park to be located on separate street frontage, at the entrances to 55 Chapel Street and 70 Bridge Street in Nonantum. The 170,913 sq.ft. subject property is located at 55 Chapel/70 Bridge Street (Section 14, Block 01) Lot 14, in a Manufacturing district. The site currently contains several former manufacturing buildings used for office and research and development purposes. The complex of buildings has several entrances, and is accessed from both Bridge Street and Chapel Street, creating a somewhat confusing circulation pattern for visitors. The proposed free-standing signs are to be nearly identical, featuring two-sided aluminum signs with internal fluorescent illumination and a duranodic bronze color. (SEE ATTACHMENT "B" for sign detail at 70 Bridge Street)

III. BACKGROUND

The applicant appeared several times before the Urban Design and Beautification Commission (UDBC) to seek approval for a replacement free-standing sign at 70 Bridge Street. In the process of UDBC review, it was discovered that neither of the existing signs had prior special permit approvals, yet were installed after the date sign regulations were established. The Planning Department and City Clerk's office researched all property files related to this property complex, but did not find any documents to establish when the signs were first installed or permitted.

The petitioner believes the sign at 55 Chapel Street was installed in the 1990s. It is an internally illuminated box sign mounted on two poles, which are in turn mounted on a stone and brick base. The existing sign at 70 Bridge Street is believed to have been erected in the middle to late 1970s and is a flat panel metal sign mounted on two poles. The petitioner is now seeking to legalize the existing sign at 55 Chapel Street and to replace and legalize the 2nd free-standing sign at 70 Bridge Street. Both signs are to read "Chapel Bridge Park," and include the site address. The UDBC supports the design and placement of both free-standing signs.

IV. SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

In reviewing this petition, the Board of Aldermen should consider the following:

- *Whether the nature of the use of the premises, the architecture of the building or its location with reference to the street is such that free-standing signs should be permitted in the public interest; and*
- *Whether the location or size of the sign will have any adverse impacts on the surrounding neighborhood, and/or will pose any visibility issues for traffic exiting or entering the site.*

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE AND NEIGHBORHOOD

A. Site

The 170,193 sq.ft. subject property is located at 55 Chapel/70 Bridge Street (Section 14, Block 01 Lot 14), in a Manufacturing district. The site contains several buildings, ranging from two to four stories, which were converted from original manufacturing uses to office and research and development space, as well as parking areas. The two proposed free-standing signs are at opposite sides of the site, along Chapel Street and Bridge Street, which provide the main access to the property.

B. Neighborhood

The subject property is located near the northern border of Newton in the village of Nonantum between Chapel Street to the east and Bridge Street to the west. The surrounding neighborhood is mostly residential, with an eclectic mix of residential architecture and some retail and commercial uses located along nearby main arterial streets. There is also a large parking lot, owned and controlled by the petitioner, located immediately to the west of the site across Bridge Street.

VI. ANALYSIS

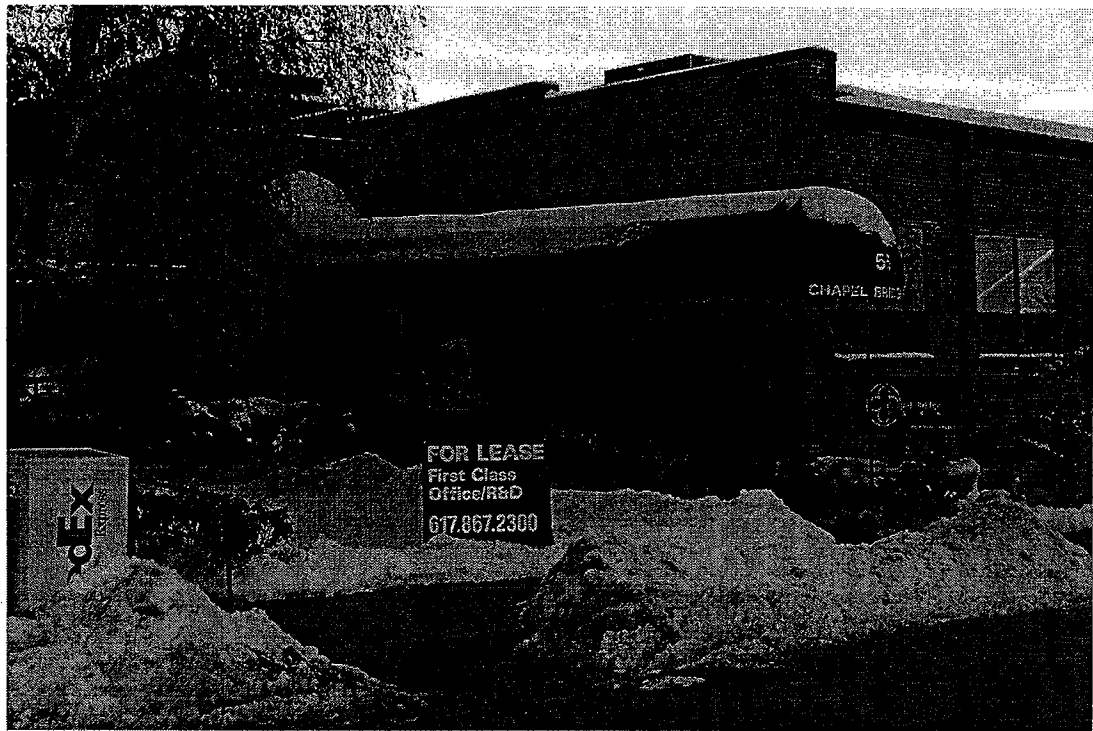
A. Technical Considerations, Sec.30-20(l)

The following table compares the proposed signs with the requirements of the Sign Ordinance:

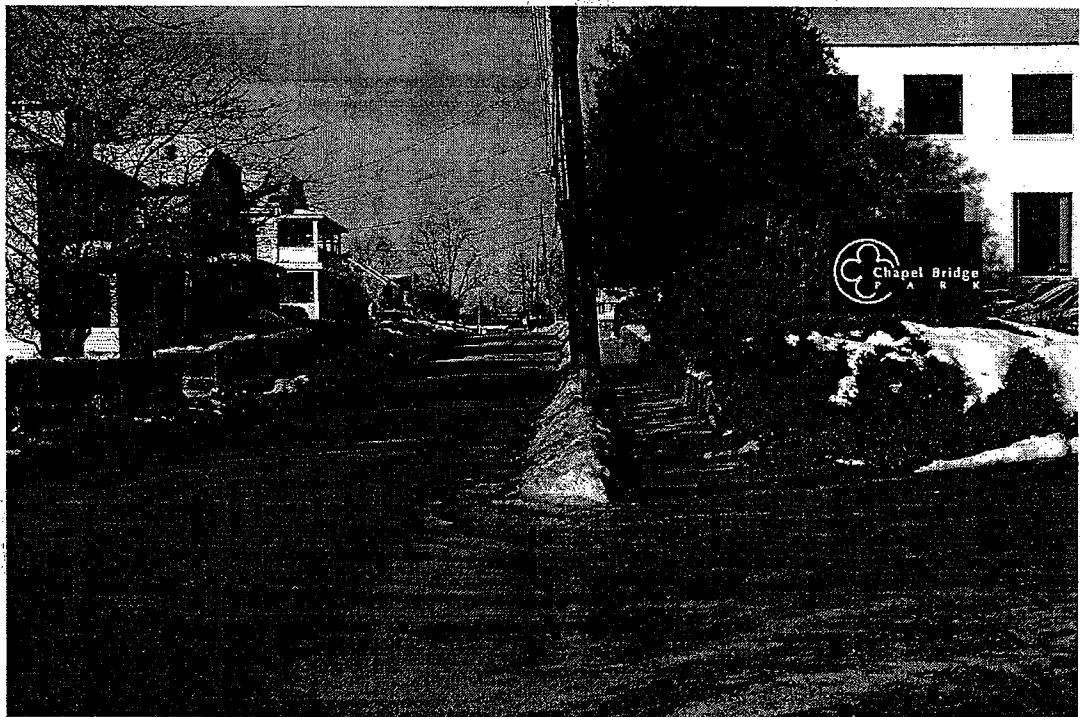
	Ordinance	55 Chapel St. Proposed for Legalization	70 Bridge St. Proposed
Height	16 ft.	7 ft. (2 ft. 3 in. face)	7 ft. 2 in. (2 ft. 2 in. face)
Length	10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. 3 in.
Face Area	35 sq. ft.	14.06 sq. ft.	14.08 sq. ft.

ATTACHMENT "B" shows the sign details for 70 Bridge Street. The details of the existing sign at 55 Chapel Street are located on the sheet entitled "Chapel Street, Existing Sign Plantings #55 Chapel Street." Although the petitioner is not proposing to change the sign at the 55 Chapel Street entrance, because they are seeking to legalize it, the Planning Department recommends that the petitioner submit a detailed elevation, similar to what was prepared for the new 70 Bridge Street (*SEE ATTACHMENT "B"*), prior to the Working Session. Although the dimensions of the existing sign at 55 Chapel Street are described on the sheet "Bridge Street, Existing Sign Plantings, #55 Bridge Street" a more detailed elevation should be included, and referenced in the Board Order, if the Board chooses to approve these signs (in order for the City to have documentation of the sign as it presently exists, in the event that any future changes to the sign are proposed).

The proposed and existing sign are to be nearly identical two-sided aluminum signs with internal fluorescent illumination, cut-out letters and logo backs with frosted acrylic sheets, in a duranodic bronze color. The proposed free-standing signs also meet the illumination requirements of Section 30-20(l). The Urban Design and Beautification Committee supports the proposed design and placement of the signs.



*Existing sign (to the right of canopy), to be legalized at
55 Chapel Street.*



*Existing sign at 70 Bridge Street, to be replaced with sign similar to existing
sign at 55 Chapel Street, per Attachment "B".*

Where permission is granted for a free-standing sign, Section 30-20(f)(1) establishes these as the principal signs. As a result, should the proposed free-standing signs be approved, any existing or future wall signs on site must meet the dimensional requirements for secondary wall signs per Section 30-20(f)(2). It is worth noting that the awning sign shown in the photo above is permitted under Section 30-19(f)(5).

B. Relevant Site Plan Approval Criteria, Sec.30-23

1. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site

The two proposed signs are both located behind the sidewalks and set back far enough from the street frontage and property lines that they do not seem to impede vehicular sight lines or pedestrian traffic from their proposed locations. The free-standing signs should make identification of the property easier for both pedestrians and vehicles approaching along the street.

2. Screening of parking areas and structures

The petitioner is proposing to keep the existing landscaping at the location of the two proposed signs largely intact, retaining the high dogwood, rhododendron, cherry, and crawling juniper at 55 Chapel Street and the high white pine, rhododendron, yew, andromeda and mungo pine at the 70 Bridge Street site. A single yew at the 70 Bridge Street location will be removed for sign installation and will be re-planted to match the existing landscaping following sign installation. The landscaping at both sites should allow visibility for both the signs and vehicular and pedestrian access to remain unimpeded.

C. Relevant Special Permit Criteria, Sec.30-24

1. The specific site is an appropriate location for such use/structure.

The landscaped areas at 70 Bridge Street and 55 Chapel Street are sufficient in size to anchor the proposed free-standing signs. The locations proposed for the signs are appropriate for identification purposes of the property by both motorists and pedestrians, which are not currently served by any existing or proposed wall signs on the subject property. The building's address numbers are also not very visible from the street, which makes location and identification of the properties difficult without the proposed signs. The sign at 70 Bridge Street is also across the street from the petitioner's visitors parking area, and will help visitors find their way to the site.

2. The use as developed and operated will not adversely affect the neighborhood.

The proposed signs should not have any adverse impacts on adjacent properties in terms of accessibility or safety. There are several other free-standing signs used for business and commercial identification associated with several nearby properties along Chapel and Bridge Streets, and thus the proposed free-standing signs should not appear out of character or adversely affect the identity or visual characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood.

Directly across the street from the proposed sign at 55 Chapel Street is a surface parking lot controlled by the petitioner. The nearest single-family home is located at least 80 ft.

from the proposed sign at 55 Chapel Street and should not be impacted. The sign proposed for 70 Bridge Street is located across from several single-family homes that will have a direct view of the proposed sign. The City's Zoning Ordinance states in Section 30-20(i) that no sign shall be lighted between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. ***The Planning Department recommends that the hours when the sign may be lit should be restricted even further, to prevent any adverse impact on the residential abutters across Bridge Street.***

The petitioner states that because the sign at 70 Bridge Street is across from the visitors' parking lot, he would like the sign to remain lit until 8:00 p.m. The sign at 55 Chapel Street is currently on a timer, set to turn the light off at 11:00 p.m. per the zoning regulations, and the petitioner would like to continue this practice. Since standing signs are utilized to direct potential customers and clients to the place(s) of business at these sites, it is not clear why the 55 Chapel Street sign would need to be illuminated until 11:00 p.m., given that the site includes a mix of office and research and development uses. ***Either at the public hearing or prior to the Working Session, the petitioner should provide information on the hours of operation of the businesses, as they relate to the requested hours of illumination for each of the signs.*** Absent any justification for the proposed late night illumination, the Planning Department would recommend that the lights in both signs be turned off one hour after the close of business, based on the regular business hours for the tenants.

VII. SUMMARY

The petitioner is requesting to legalize an existing free-standing sign at 55 Chapel Street, and to install a matching (replacement) free-standing sign at 70 Bridge Street. The proposed signs should improve the visibility of the Chapel Bridge Park properties to both passing motorists and pedestrians without negatively impacting the property or surrounding properties. The dimensions and characteristics of the proposed signs meet the requirements of Sec 30-20(l).

As noted above, the requested hours of illumination do not seem to match the expected business hours of the office and research/development uses on this site. Absent any justification for the proposed late night illumination, the Planning Department would recommend that the lights in both signs be turned off one hour after the close of business, based on the regular business hours for the tenants.

Either at the public hearing or prior to the Working Session, the petitioner should provide information on the regular business hours of the current tenants. In addition, prior to the Working Session, the petitioner should provide a more detailed elevation, similar to what was prepared for 70 Bridge Street on the Sheet titled "Exterior Signage, Chapel Bridge Park" prepared by Andrew Cohen Architects, for the sign at 55 Chapel Street.

ATTACHMENTS


ATTACHMENT A: Zoning Review Memorandum, November 18, 2005

ATTACHMENT B: "Exterior Signage, Chapel Bridge Park" 70 Bridge Street, prepared by Andrew Cohen Architects, dated July 22, 2005.

Inspectional Services Department Zoning Review Memorandum

Dt: November 18, 2005

To: Don Domoretsky, Property Manager, Chapel Bridge, Inc.

Fr: Juris Alksnitis, Chief Zoning Code Official 

Cc: Michael Kruse, Director of Planning and Development
John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services

Re: Freestanding signs at Chapel Bridge Park

Applicant: Chapel Bridge, Inc.

Site: 55 Chapel St./70 Bridge St., Nonantum Zoning: Manufacturing Current use: Office/R&D	SBL: Section 14, Block 01, Lot 14 Lot Area: 170,913 sq. ft. Prop. use: Office/R&D
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Background:

This Manufacturing zoned site contains several buildings which have been converted from manufacturing type uses from an earlier era to uses such as office and research and development. Buildings and parking located on the site have access both from Chapel St. on the east and from Bridge St. on the west. A number of months ago, the applicant sought approval for a free standing sign at 70 Bridge St., and consulted with the Urban Design and Beautification Commission (Commission). As a result, it was also found that another free standing sign located at 55 Chapel St. had been installed without a special permit. Consequently, the petitioner is now bringing forward a proposal for two freestanding signs, one each at 70 Bridge St., and 55 Chapel St. respectively. The applicant seeks to update the sign at 70 Bridge St. and legalize the existing sign at 55 Chapel St. Both signs will read "Chapel Bridge Park". The Commission supports the proposed design and placement of the two freestanding signs.

Administrative determinations

1. As all freestanding signs are subject to approval of the Board of Aldermen per Section 30-20(l), the signs requested by the applicant require a special permit.
2. The proposed freestanding signs meet the illumination requirements of Section 30-20(i).
3. Each sign meets the overall height requirement, linear dimensional requirements, and area requirement of Section 30-20(l).

4. Where permission is granted for a freestanding sign, Section 30-20(f)(1) establishes these as the principal signs. As a result, any wall signs, if requested in the future, must meet secondary sign requirements as set forth in Section 30-20(f)(2).
5. Zoning review provided hereby is limited to aspects pertaining to the Sign Ordinance only. See "Zoning Relief Summary" below.

Zoning Relief Summary		
Ordinance	Action Required – Each location	
	Sign	
30-20(l)	Approval of 2 free standing signs.	X
	Site	
30-23	Approval of site plans pertaining to each sign location.	X
	Special Permit	
30-24(d)	Approval of special permit(s).	X

Plans reviewed:

- Plan titled "ALTA/ASCM Land Title Survey, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA", Dwg. #2863ALT2, dated 1/28/00, last revised 11/13/02 as prepared by R.E. Cameron & Associates, Inc., 681 Washington, Street, Norwood, MA 02062, bearing no stamp or signature.
- Plan titled "Stake Out Plan, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA", Dwg. #2863, dated 1/28/00, revised 6/22/00 as prepared by R.E. Cameron & Associates, Inc., 681 Washington, Street, Norwood, MA 02062, stamped and signed by Scott D. Cameron, Land Surveyor, with color photos of proposed signs.
- Plan titled "Bridge Street, Existing Sign Plantings, 70 Bridge Street, Newton, MA", Dwg. #2863-S1, dated 9/27/05, as prepared by R.E. Cameron & Associates, Inc., 681 Washington, Street, Norwood, MA 02062, bearing no stamp or signature.
- Plan titled "Chapel Street, Existing Sign Plantings, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA", Dwg. #2863-S2, dated 9/27/05, as prepared by R.E. Cameron & Associates, Inc., 681 Washington, Street, Norwood, MA 02062, bearing no stamp or signature.
- Plan titled "Exterior Signage, Chapel Bridge Park, 70 Bridge Street, Newton, MA", dated July 22, 2005 as prepared by Andrew Cohen Architects, 30 Boston Post Road, Wayland, MA 01778, bearing no stamp or signature.
- Color photographs by Andrew Cohen Architects illustrating existing and proposed signage at 70 Bridge St. and showing views along Bridge St.

